

WXPost

JUL 7 1975

Area Agencies Aid SE Asian

By Janis Johnson

Washington Post Staff Writer

More than 400 Indochina refugee families in the Washington area have applied for public assistance and many have been placed on the welfare rolls despite an absence of state guidelines establishing who is eligible for assistance and what needs are covered.

Area social service officials say they expect full reimbursement from the federal government for refugees financial, medical, social service and food stamp benefits under a \$405 million congressional appropriation for refugee resettlement.

However, actual guidelines for the refugee assistance program, which must be prepared by the states, have not been handed down and one county, Prince William, has refused to place any

refugees on the welfare rolls until they are.

In other areas, however, refugees are being provided with benefits under the criteria of existing programs for American citizens.

"Sure, we're putting ourselves out on a limb, assuming we'll get reimbursed," said Ed Amundson, deputy director of the Fairfax department of social services. "But with an emergency, we can't just do nothing. Some of these people are totally without funds," he said.

According to an incomplete list provided by area welfare officials, Fairfax County received more than 80 applications for assistance from refugees by mid-June; Montgomery County has 97 applications covering more than 200 persons; Prince Georges County has five involving about 25 persons;

the District has 186 cases, Arlington has 25 cases, and Prince William County about 50 individuals.

Officials said the number of refugees covered by each application ranges from 1 to 11 or more.

Those refugees who qualify for the federal support are Cambodians and Vietnamese nationals who fled their lands and are unwilling to return. They have no official immigrant status here, and must later go through the legal entry process, but are allowed to work in the meantime.

Some of the confusion surrounding the issuance of welfare benefits to refugees stems from the question of sponsorship.

No refugee can leave a camp or reception center without a sponsor. Nevertheless, some officials said, some refugees are arriving

here without sponsors. Apparently they have come here from other parts of the United States to be near friends or relatives. Others have had relatives or friends or other individuals as sponsors who can no longer support them.

Most refugees will, on reaching a community, have been resettled by one or more of the seven voluntary agencies cooperation with the government and will have obtained a local sponsor — an individual, church civic organization or other group. The rest will have friends or relatives as sponsors.

At least 50,000 of the 131,000 refugees in the U.S. are expected to be resettled by four religious organizations whose programs were launched without government subsidy. Under the \$405 million federal funds, each agency will receive \$500 for each refugee assisted.

Refugees, Count on Federal Refund

The four largest voluntary resettlement agencies in the metropolitan area have placed over 1,500 people. They say they are desperately short of additional sponsors, and hundreds of adults in the refugee families are looking for jobs.

Sponsors, it is understood by these voluntary agencies and the government, offer a moral commitment to provide temporary shelter and food, clothing and pocket money, help in finding jobs, enrolling children in school, locating permanent housing, acquiring minimal furniture, and arranging for payment of routine expenses until the refugees become self-sufficient.

"Evidently this has not been fully explained to the sponsors," said Mary Hall of the Arlington department of human resources. "We've had some applying here within three to 10 days of

arrival and fully expecting us to support them."

But her view was disputed by heads of some local voluntary agencies who said they have strict standards for sponsorship and would find a new sponsor for any refugees whose initial sponsorship had failed. They said their sponsors have met refugee costs from funerals to emergency root canals.

The Senate Subcommittee on Refugees has received dozens of calls from around the country reporting sponsorships breaking down and people going on welfare, but these refugees usually are not under the auspices of a voluntary agency, a subcommittee employee said.

In some cases, they are refugees whose sponsor cannot pay for extraordinary costs reimbursable under the federal appropriation, such as major medical expenses. "The main break-

downs, from my experience, are families who got here before the camps were set up and their families and friends couldn't help them," said Pat Swain of the Baptist Committee of Metropolitan Washington for Refugee Relief. Her agency has placed 220 people, including some of the cases in which the refugees' initial sponsor could not continue that responsibility.

"The whole idea of sponsorship is to keep the refugees off the welfare rolls," she said.

In Prince William County, welfare officials recently spread the word that all refugees in that county should list their names in the welfare office "so that we'd know who was in the county when a program came along," said Ricardo Perez, social service director.

He said he received 50 names and then "overwhelmed" by the number, decided not to pay any immediate benefits.

The welfare department referred a refugee family of 10 who had arrived from Louisiana to Holy Family Church, a parish active in helping refugees, for assistance.

Prince William County Supervisor Don Turner, who sits on the Prince William welfare board, commented at the board's recent meeting that he thought sponsors should bear all costs for refugees regardless of any federal subsidies.

"I'm against the whole program being federally financed and feel we first have a moral obligation to take care of our own people in our own county before we help new people coming in," he said.